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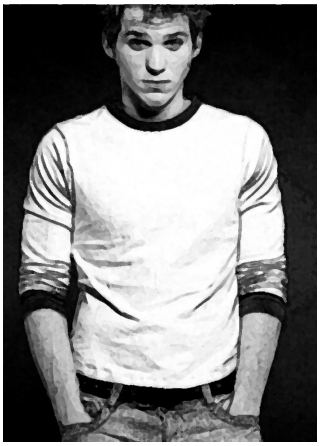

Abstract

Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) have had difficulties in achieving educational, vocational, and community outcomes that would lead to personal success and satisfaction. Some of these outcomes relate to how special education transition programs integrate effective approaches to support success with these students. In this article, five primary suggestions, (1) self-determination, (2) appropriate assessment, (3) personal future's planning, (4) individualized education programs carefully linked with transition plans, and (5) naturally supported, successful academic, vocational, and community placements, are described to improve the transition planning of youth with EBD.

Keywords

adolescence, emotional and behavioral disorders, transition, employment

Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) historically have had difficulty with factors traditionally related to school and community success. Developing and maintaining relationships, demonstrating academic competence, passing classes, earning high school credits, graduating from high school, and maintaining employment have all

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been elusive for this group of students (Wagner & Davis, 2006). These findings first became a national focus in the 1980s from state studies on adolescents with disabilities (Edgar, 1988; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985), followed by findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs. The NLTS was conducted by SRI International, and authors of the study reported that educational underachievement, unemployment, and lack of engagement in postsecondary education and community activities were indicative of youth and young adults with EBD (Wagner, 1991; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993).

An emphasis on improving educational and therapeutic programs became evident in the 1990s, and several projects were funded to find ways to improve the outcomes of these youth. Three of these, Project RENEW (Malloy, Drake, Abate, & Cormier, 2010), Project ARIES (Bullis, Moran, Todis, Benz, & Johnson, 2002), and TIP (R. Clark, Taylor, & Deschenes, 2010), provided a framework for working with students with EBD at the secondary level. Essential principles across these research and demonstration projects have included reliance on self-determination, unconditional caring, strength-based services, and use of flexible resources (Malloy et al., 2010). All of the projects have focused on high school completion, meaningful employment, and coordination with and application for postsecondary education when indicated. It is also typical of these programs to use *personal futures* plans to identify the steps to take to complete high school credits, access employment, identify peer and adult mentors, and determine necessary social and community supports for success. Careful coordination of these principles and practices has been related to improved rates of success in education, employment, and community adjustment for youth and young adults with EBD (Malloy et al., 2010).

In addition, several feature articles in the past 20 years have provided elements for high school special educators to use as evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for students. These include Cheney and Barringer (1999), Jones, Dohrn, and Dunn (2007), Simpson, Peterson, and Smith (2011), Tsai (2011), and Walker and Fecser (2002). Those articles discuss many essential classroom or program practices for working with adolescents with EBD, such as classroom structure, routines, behavior management, social skill instruction, behavior intervention planning, partnerships with families and agencies, and self-management. The reader is referred to these articles for in-depth discussions of classroom or program practices.

This article provides current recommendations for working with students with EBD in high school transition classes and programs. The recommendations are derived from chapters in Cheney (2010). Another helpful resource on transition and EBD is R. Clark and Unruh's (2009) book.

Transition services were defined in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), as

> a results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

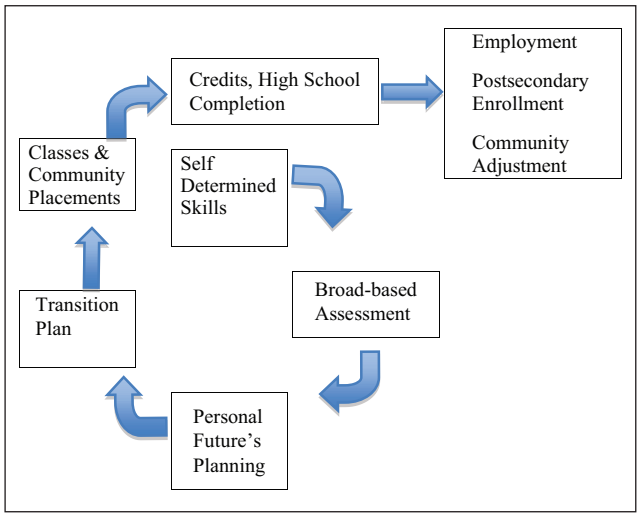

Figure 1. The transition cycle

Transition planning is based on individual needs and considers the youth's strengths, preferences, and interests. It includes (a) instruction, (b) related services, (c) community experiences, (d) employment and other postschool adult living, and, if appropriate, (e) daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

To improve the transition process and meet the requirements of IDEIA 2004, five primary suggestions are provided in this article: (1) self-determination, (2) assessment, (3) personal future's planning, (4) individualized education programs (IEPs) carefully linked with transition plans, and (5) naturally supported, successful academic, vocational, and community placements. Figure 1 depicts this cyclical, developmental process.

Self-Determination: Assist All Students to Become Skillful Self-Advocates

Self-determination has been described as

> a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding

> of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential in self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in society. (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2)

Over the past two decades, self-determination has become a recommended component of transition services and moved transition planning away from an agency-centric to a person-centered approach. In making this shift, special educators should be acutely aware of listening carefully to the goals of students and less to their own thoughts of what is available for placements within the school. It has been clear across the amendments and reauthorizations of IDEA since 1990 that transition planning must consider students' strengths, interests, and preferences and that student involvement should be central in transition and educational planning. The central challenge for special educators and transition teams working with students with EBD is how to integrate self-determination approaches into transition planning.

Many secondary special educators may find the notion of self-determination with students with EBD difficult to implement because they find their students have unattainable or unrealistic expectations. Many special educators have listened to a student who wants to become a doctor, yet is failing all his science and math classes; the student who wants to be in movies, yet her attendance in classes ensures that she won't graduate; the student who wants to become a professional athlete but who won't go to gym class or play organized sports. These examples may lead educators to assume or conclude that these are unrealistic expectations for students with EBD. Yet, listening carefully in a self-determination approach may provide the educator with some ideas regarding starting points for a student.

Self-determination may not answer the toughest questions that arise in planning an adolescent's future, but it creates a new and refreshing mind-set that assists educators in ways to engage adolescents in thinking about their futures and working toward their goals. Discussing the steps that are needed to become a doctor, the knowledge, grades, and degrees to qualify for medical school, might be the beginning of developing cognitive planning skills that can be used throughout one's life in work, home, or community. These discussions should integrate discussions regarding how a student's present disability may require accommodations in school or in the work place to meet goals. These become the factual, reality-based discussions that can lead to important decision making on the part of the student. Although a student may not make it to Hollywood as a movie star in the next year, she may be able to planfully improve her attendance in a performing arts class and participate in a school play.

Bullis et al. (2002) reported that students with EBD whose transition teams helped them with self-determination skills were more likely to obtain their desired employment outcomes and were more likely to positively engage in competitive employment activities. Yet, findings from several other studies suggest that youth with EBD demonstrate low rates of self-determined behavior and have limited confidence regarding the effectiveness of their self-determination efforts (Carter, 2010; Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006). These findings suggest that self-determination instructional needs for youth with EBD may be more pronounced than those of youth with other disabilities.

An example regarding poorly developed self-determination skills for a youth with EBD may be illustrative. Imagine Carman, a ninth grade student who has been receiving special education services for EBD since fourth grade (see Note 1). Throughout his elementary and middle school programs, Carman was apprised by his teachers and parents of the content of his IEP goals, was given a daily schedule and a reinforcement system, and had close behavioral monitoring throughout the school day. When he entered his high school program he was asked what he wanted to do, who might help him meet his goals, and how he would like to schedule his classes. In addition, his special education teacher asked him to review his IEP and let him know within a week what he thought was important to continue or delete from the IEP. The special educator expected Carman to be a ready and able participant in goal setting, goal evaluation, and IEP development. Carman became somewhat overwhelmed by this level of responsibility for his daily school activities and was not prepared for the IEP meeting, yet these are the exact skills he will need to navigate the world he will encounter as a young adult in the near future. A rather important first step for Carman would be to participate in a meaningful assessment not only to determine his academic, vocational, and community interests to shape his school and transition program over the next 4 years of high school but also to assess his self-determination skills.

Assessment: Thorough Assessments to Determine Student Strengths

IDEIA (2004) mandated postsecondary goals that are "based on age-appropriate transition assessments." To meet the intent of the IDEIA, transition teams should actively involve students in a self-determination planning process to translate assessment results into acceptable and effective instruction and services. All of the activities on the IEP and transition plan must consider a student's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs across relevant life domains. In addition, the information gathered from any transition-related assessment must be linked to the development of postsecondary goals (for employment, education and training, and independent living). Students who are using

Table 1. Sample Assessments

Area	Measures
Interests and preferences	*Self-Directed Search* (Holland, 1994) *Career Assessment Inventory* (Johansson, 2002)
Aptitude and abilities	*Differential Aptitude Test Battery*–5th ed. (Psychological Corporation, 1992) *Occupational Aptitude Survey and Interest Schedule*–3rd ed. (Parker, 2002) *Wiesen Test of Mechanical Aptitude* (Wiesen, 1999)
Personal style and preferences	*Student Style Questionnaire*
Interpersonal relationships	Behavioral observation
Self-determination	*Transition Planning Inventory* (G. M. Clark, Patton, & Moulton, 2006) *Self-Determination Assessment Battery* (Hoffman, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004) *ARC's Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer, 2000)
Academic and intelligence measures	Triennial special education assessments Criterion-referenced tests for classes

self-determined skills will be assertive in identifying their postsecondary goals and are more apt to have realistic goals for their future. What's more, self-determination training and experiences give students a natural opportunity to articulate their preferences and goals and work to identify strategies and resources to help achieve the goals.

Kortering, Braziel, and Sitlington (2010) noted that the major goal of the assessment process is to be thorough. Special educators should become familiar with their students across many domains, which include (a) background information, (b) interests and preferences, (c) aptitudes (or underlying abilities), (d) personal style, (e) interpersonal relationships, (f) self-determination, (g) academics and intelligence, and (h) employment-related skills. Table 1 presents examples of assessments in most of these domains. Although the special educator will not likely have to use all of the tools described in the table, it is advisable to become more familiar and proficient at these various assessment approaches.

Kortering et al. (2010) suggested that the process should lead to building a portfolio that can begin by looking at a student's past IEPs and continue through short interviews. In a semistructured interview, educators might pursue two central themes: (1) familial and (2) individual background of the student. In the familial area, it would be helpful to ask the student several questions in the interview, such as those developed by Kortering et al. (see Table 2).

Table 3 presents an example of assessment results for Emma, a ninth grade student with EBD (see Note 1). It provides information for this student's background, interests, work habits, and abilities so that the IEP team has sufficient information to develop the IEP and transition plan.

Personal Futures Planning: Reveal the Student's Dreams and Social Supports

From Emma's assessment summary, it appears that she will not succeed in high school credit earning because of her attendance and failing grades in key classes. She believes that key classes such as history and English are boring and not meaningful. The assessments also reveal that she is interested in being physically active and prefers her expressive, artistic side. One method for learning more about Emma's interests and her social support system is to use the *personal futures planning* (PFP) process. PFP is used to help youth create a meaningful, personalized, individualized plan, through conversations that reveal their own vision. Malloy et al. (2010) discussed how this is done by mapping (a) one's current situation, (b) relevant past experiences that shaped the present, (c) positive experiences as well as those that have not worked well, (d) one's social network and other resources, (e) goals, dreams, and wishes, (f) challenges or possible roadblocks, and (g) detailed steps in an action plan to start initial steps that will shape social, educational, and vocational success. Malloy et al. suggested that the PFP process, when conducted well, builds students' self-determination skills.

In Emma's case, a PFP would begin by having the special educator or transition coordinator meet with Emma and any of her invited friends and family members to develop a PFP. Although the process would be an extended interview, the PFP would create a visual map on butcher paper or in a digital file to identify Emma's goals and dreams for her future adulthood, the supports necessary to accomplish her goals and dreams, and immediate steps to take to begin a productive action plan. For example, since Emma has clear artistic and expressive strengths, she might state that she wants to pursue a career in fine arts or visual arts. She dreams of creating sets for plays, theater, and movies or might be interested in doing interior design work. She also states that she has been influenced by an aunt who has quilted and painted for years and has had some success in displaying her work in galleries. On a few occasions, Emma has been able to visit local museums and has spent hours viewing paintings and fabric art displays. She dreams of being an artist who can create such fine art.

A creative special educator can turn this information into a productive curriculum for a student like Emma. Although arts classes can fulfill only a small portion of a student's

Table 2. Semistructured Interview Questions

Regarding family background:
1. What do your parents do? Did they finish high school?
2. What is the level of education for your parents and older brothers and sisters?
3. Do you have any older brothers or sisters who have jobs? If so, describe their jobs.
4. Do you have any relatives or friends who you think have a neat job?
Regarding a student's individual background:
1. What are your favorite and least favorite classes in school (and why)?
2. What classes would you like to take in high school?
3. What do you plan to do when you get done with high school? Do you plan to go to college (if so, where and to study what)?
4. Where do you plan to live after you finish high school?
5. What are three jobs you are thinking you might like to do after finishing high school?
6. What are your hobbies, interests, or things you like to do during your free time?
7. Have you ever had a paying job? If so, describe your previous or current jobs.
8. Do you have access to reliable transportation or a driver's license?
9. What are three things you would like to learn in school this year?

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credit earning in high school, it is possible to leverage this information to help her earn credits in classes she is currently failing. It is also possible to look for alternative classes that might lead to credit earning in classes that she is presently avoiding, such as English and history. Many special educators work with general educators and administrators to offer alternative coursework for courses that are perceived as boring by teachers. Other alternatives can include online classes, independent studies, courses in special education, and courses in bridge programs with community colleges. The important point is to emphasize to Emma that her high school completion depends on credit earning and that, ultimately, graduation will position her to pursue her artistic interests.

Transition Plan: Prepare the Blueprint for Success

With this information, there are many possibilities for transition planning with Emma. The first step is to take steps with her to lead the team meeting. This is considered a self-determination skill and will require instruction and support from the special educator and transition team. The goal would be to enhance Emma's leadership skills for facilitating effective meetings. Some of these skills include (a) clearly stating intended outcomes, (b) planning an effective agenda, (c) providing time limits for each item, and (d) having Emma determine her priority items and "musts" to have completed. For example, if Emma's most important priority item is to secure credits for a community placement at an art gallery, then the special educator should help Emma put this at the top of the agenda and identify those who might support or challenge the item. Emma and the special educator could then role-play the meeting and this item specifically with the goal of obtaining approval for this credit earning placement.

By the end of the meeting, Emma should have specific goals and actions. Shriner, Plotner, and Rose (2010) provided several essential steps for completing items on a transition plan. They noted that for transition-age students with EBD, goals addressing academic skills, social-behavioral skills, and transition-related outcomes are needed, and the goals should be logically connected to the student's postschool outcomes. A well-written goal should contain three components: (a) conditions for demonstrating the behaviors(s), (b) observable, measurable descriptors of the behavior(s), and (c) criteria for demonstration of the behavior(s). For Emma, one might easily envision several goals for the IEP and transition plan. They should clearly complement the ultimate goal of community adjustment. Table 4 presents examples of Emma's goals. Short-term objectives and benchmarks are included for two of the goals.

Naturally Supported Community Placements: Make It All Happen

Perhaps the biggest challenge in implementing transition plans for youth with EBD is to find natural community supports beyond the walls of the high school. Many youth are disenchanted with or alienated from the high school experience by the time they are 14 to 16 years old. They may directly ask for shortened school days, or their actions may indicate they want to be out of school when they are truant or tardy. A constant challenge, therefore, is for special educators, transition specialists, and team members to develop attractive, productive placements for these youth. Although placements can include high school classes, it is imperative that youth alienated from high school have placements in community businesses and agencies and work with individuals who support their success. By including community placements in the transition plan, the student is able to access more flexible ways to earn high school credits.

Successful transition programs have found that it is necessary to develop and maintain a wide array of community contacts and placements to meet the needs of youth with EBD. In Emma's case, a highly structured half-day program in credit earning classes at the high school might be combined with afternoon work at an art gallery or theater to

Table 3. Example for Assessment Portfolio

Background information
Emma is a 9th grader who has been in special education since 2nd grade. She was found eligible for services under the category of emotional/behavioral disability (EBD) due to significant difficulty getting along with her peers and teachers coupled with unsatisfactory grade reports. Her social and academic difficulties continued, and her reevaluations in 5th and 8th grades continued to qualify her for special education services as EBD. She has an attendance rate of 82% for the current semester. She reports enjoying making crafts and expresses an interest in jobs involving artistic skill. Her current plan is to get a diploma and attend a 2-year college. This plan is proving problematic in that she is failing key academic classes and is at risk of not getting her diploma. She does not have access to reliable transportation but has a driver's license. She has worked mowing lawns for neighbors and briefly as a nursing home aide. Her mother and stepfather work in area factories as an office assistant and production specialist, respectively. She has no contact with her birthfather. She has been referred to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and they plan to be part of her coordinated transition services.
Previous Test Results
Emma's most recent psychological report shows a verbal (95) and performance (105) IQ in the average range, and a full-scale IQ (98) that is also average. Her achievement scores (standard scores) are as follows: broad math–84, broad reading–84, and broad written language–88. The achievement scores are all in the lower limits of the average range.
Vocational Results
Test results included the *Self-Directed Search–Form R,* which showed scores in the high average range in the artistic category, but in the very low range in all other areas. These scores were consistent with the *Career Assessment Inventory–Level 1,* where she scored in the average range in only arts and crafts. This score pattern suggests a rather narrow range of interests. The *Student Style Questionnaire* showed her personal style or preferences to include three prevailing traits: introvert (strong), feeling (strong), and imaginative (moderate).
Work Habits and Attitude
Emma has considerable difficulty in classes (e.g., History and English), which she deems boring or too difficult. She fails to complete her homework and receives poor grades in her academic classes. She has good work habits and a positive attitude toward her physical education, home economics, and art classes.

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meet the intent and outcomes on her transition plan. With a plan of action such as this, several questions and concerns arise about supervision and transportation. Although the special educator or classroom paraprofessional my be more readily available to assist Emma with credit earning, learning objectives, social skills, and self-management goals (i.e., Goals 1–4 in Table 4), the school team may be much more challenged in helping her with Goal 5. The realities of declining resources in school districts may mean that there is not a school staff member who can assist her with transportation to a 1:00 p.m. start time at an art gallery. In addition, if the staff at the gallery want to meet with the special educator on a weekly basis, this will place additional time requirements on the special educator. Other possible barriers include liability issues when students are off campus, credit earning for nontraditional classes, and concerns for meeting state standards on academic subjects.

These challenges bring to the fore the use of natural supports and interagency supports. Natural supports will be important in community settings when school district staff are unable to supervise Emma daily. A mentor might be sought from Big Brothers Big Sisters, through other school district groups, or from community agencies. The benefits of mentors with adolescents have been well documented (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005), and a willing, capable mentor could meet with Emma several times per week to ensure her success in community placements. Likewise, another community agency, such as a staff member from vocational rehabilitation or a similar nonprofit, might be able to assist with this supervision. In the final analysis, participants in projects like RENEW and TIP report that these community placements are most beneficial to their completion of school and apprenticing for work.

Summary

This article has presented five recommendations for improving transition outcomes for adolescents with EBD. Examples have been presented for self-determination, assessment, PFP, transition goal development, and community placements. Although these may not address the full continuum of issues of contemporary youth (e.g., substance use, gang involvement, depression, aggression), they provide the necessary elements for a transition framework for educators working with youth with EBD. Employing these approaches in a consistent manner should lead to improvements in transition programs serving youth with EBD.

Table 4. Transition Goals and Benchmarks

Goal 1: In vocational skills class, Emma will complete 8 job applications with 100% accuracy by the end of first semester (January 2012).
Short-Term Objective/Benchmark for Measuring Progress on the Annual Goal
1. In the first month/September of class, Emma will write her demographic and related work experience sections for a job application with 90% accuracy.
2. In the second month of Emma's class, Emma will use results from self-assessments of strength and weakness to write a summary for the job application.
3. In the second month of class, Emma will identify at least three persons as references.
By the third month of class Emma will use this information to write four of her job applications.
4. By the last month of the semester, Emma will write all 8 applications.
Goal 2: While working in group activities during vocational skills class, Emma will use self-management strategies to (1) match teacher ratings of her behavior with 90% accuracy and (2) limit time off task and not participating with small/large group to less than 20% of time.
Goal 3: Given a text passage of between 5–10 pages in English class, Emma will read the passage and complete assigned comprehension questions to 100% accuracy twice weekly for four weeks.
Goal 4: In a classroom setting during second semester, when a teacher asks Emma if she needs assistance or redirects her back to a task, Emma will use appropriate language (for example, "Yes, ma'am; okay; where do you want me to start?") to respond to the teacher for 80% of any observed class period.
Short-Term Objective/Benchmark for Measuring Progress on the Annual Goal
1. By February 15, given a question or redirection from a teacher, Emma will use a menu of possible responses (for example, "Yes, I need help; No, thank you") to respond appropriately for 80% of any observed class period.
2. By May 30, given a question or redirection from a teacher, and using the STAR Strategy (Stop, Think, Act, Reward), Emma will respond appropriately (for example, "Yes, please help me—Okay") for 80% of any observed class period.
Goal 5: When assigned to a community placement in an art gallery, Emma will arrive on time and complete assigned tasks on a daily basis for a four week period.

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Readers are encouraged to delve more deeply into these approaches in the references provided and to continue to think of engaging activities in the areas of employment and postsecondary education to attract their students to a more productive transition to adulthood.

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Note

1. The scenarios for Carman and Emma are fictionalized accounts drawn from several authentic situations that the author has observed but were constructed as aggregated scenarios that do not represent any specific students. All names are pseudonyms.

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